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SUBJECT: NEW SECDEF EBDANE TO CONTINUE DEFENSE REFORM

Classified By: Ambassador Kristie A. Kenney, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (U) President Arroyo's spokesman announced the appointment of Hermogenes Ebdane as the new Secretary of National Defense on January 31. The spokesman stated that "an important criteria in choosing the Department of National Defense Chief is the ability to implement or to continue what (President Arroyo) has started, and this is the Defense Reform Program." He added that President Arroyo has "full confidence in Secretary Ebdane."

¶2. (U) Secretary Ebdane is currently Secretary of the Department of Public Works and Highways. A graduate of the Philippine Military Academy, Secretary Ebdane has spent his professional career primarily in the law enforcement field. Under President Arroyo, he has served as Director General of the Philippine National Police and as National Security Advisor to the President. President Arroyo has held the portfolio of Secretary of National Defense since the resignation of then-Secretary Avelino Cruz in November 2006.

¶3. (C) Comment: The appointment is not without some controversy. In addition to allegations by the opposition of Ebdane's possible involvement in election fraud in 2004, there are reports of grumbling within the military at the appointment to Secretary of Defense of a former Philippine National Police Chief. However, in a recent press interview, Armed Forces of the Philippines Chief of Staff Hermogenes Esperon denied the existence of disaffection within the ranks at this appointment.

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KENNEY